



District of Columbia Government
Office of the State Superintendent of Education

State Literacy Plan

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MISSION AND VISION

MISSION

Through access to rigorous, integrated literacy programs from birth to age 24, all students will graduate from high school, ready for college- and career with reading, writing, speaking, listening, viewing, technology, and research skills that empower them as life-long learners and productive citizens by 2020. Our shared goal is that all students will achieve at least 75% proficiency within five years in reading and mathematics and that we will achieve a 75% high school graduation rate.

VISION

The District of Columbia is articulating a clear and focused literacy plan to support Local Education Agencies, parents, community members, and students so that DC can achieve its mission. The responsibility for detailed curriculum design, instruction, and implementation of literacy programs lies with Local Education Agencies and schools. Therefore, OSSE's focus is to support LEAs, schools, parents, and community members in

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improving children's literacy skills. OSSE's role will be to engage parents and community members in improving children's literacy skills raise the literacy expectations across curricula, build educator capacity to increase literacy instruction, and measure students' progress. OSSE has defined a set of action steps associated with each of the five primary strategies of the State Literacy Plan. As the DC OSSE continues to provide statewide leadership and support, it is committed to ensuring that all students in the capital city have a fair shot at the American dream.

DEFINITION OF LITERACY

For the purposes of this plan, OSSE has adopted The NAAL's (National Assessment of Adult Literacy) definition of literacy; the ability to use printed and written information to function in society, to achieve one's goals, and to develop one's knowledge and potential.ⁱ In today's society, the definition of literacy is continually expanding and evolving to meet society's changing needs.

Currently, however, literacy includes the ability to locate, evaluate, and communicate using a range of resources including text, visual, audio, and video sources. Literacy goes beyond fluency in reading and

writing to include the critical and effective use of language in school, home, work, and life. It is an interaction between the reader and language, as well as a way of thinking. Literate individuals can derive and convey meaning. They can use their knowledge to achieve a goal that requires the use of language skills, while orchestrating meaning from one linguistic knowledge base and applying it to another. Literacy means that one is a master of language, both in spoken and written forms. For the purpose of this plan, we define literacy as reading, writing, speaking, listening, viewing, technology, and research skills that empower individuals as life-long learners and productive citizens. This plan is focused on English literacy. This definition identifies four components to literacy: aural (listening), oral (speaking), reading, and writing. Aural/Oral skills develop at a faster pace than reading/writing skills. Educators must focus on all of these skills when teaching literacy at any age.

INTRODUCTION AND SUMMARY

Young people today need literacy skills far more advanced than have been required of any previous generation. Moreover, strong reading, writing, and communication skills are essential not only for success in school and the workplace, but also for participation in civic life. National statistics show that the number of adults who are considered functionally illiterate increases by approximately 2.25 million each year. High levels of illiteracy directly impact our safety and society. Seventy percent of prisoners in state and federal systems have low literacy skills and 85% of all juvenile offenders are considered marginally or functionally illiterate. The National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) testing indicates that the percentage of American children who are able to read well has not improved in the last 25 years. These statistics demonstrate the need for a comprehensive approach to literacy improvement.

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factors that position the District of Columbia for success is extensive and includes a vibrant charter school sector that currently educates 41% of publicly educated pupils, a head start on transforming the traditional school system under mayoral control, improved state-level capacity, a supportive network of

In recent years, the District of Columbia has been hailed as a leader in many areas of school reform, including educator recruitment, evaluation, and training; robust charter school options, innovation, and collaboration; and universal preschool. This strong reform agenda is backed by aligned leadership and support at all levels: the District of Columbia has both the experience and the political will to achieve exceptional outcomes. The list of

leading local and national partners, and District-wide interest and urgency around the work that remains to be done.

These reforms have clearly had an impact as students in the District of Columbia have made much progress in recent years. The percentage of students meeting proficiency in English/Language Arts has increased from about 36% in 2007 to about 46% in 2012. However, clearly significant challenges remain. Despite the renewed focus on raising achievement, many schools and students still struggle. Moreover, there are persistent performance gaps between subgroups. For students with special needs, only 16%

are meeting proficiency in English/Language Arts for the second year in a row. English language learners (ELLs) perform significantly better, with 36% meeting proficiency levels in English/Language Arts. In 2012, only 27 of 179 schools met Annual Measured Objectives (AMO) benchmarks in both English/Language Arts and mathematics last year. However with the removal of Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP) and ‘safe harbor’ rules, the 27 schools identified showed measurable growth in SY2011-12. The District of Columbia as a whole fell well short of AMO objectives in English/Language Arts and narrowly missed its growth target for mathematics. Based on the graduation cohort calculation, only 61% of students graduated within four years.

The purpose of this plan is to articulate OSSE’s leadership role in the complex system of stakeholders at all levels of DC’s literacy initiatives.

To improve the low overall literacy rate and to ensure a higher adolescent proficiency rate, this DC birth – age 24 literacy plan is designed to address literacy challenges across DC. Since there are differences in needs and strategies based on stages of literacy, the DC literacy plan will support different priorities for different ages:

1. Birth to age 3, when early literacy skills are developing through exposure to the environment and interactions with teachers and other adults
2. Grades Pre-K – 3, when reading skills are being taught directly and students are “learning to read.” This area of literacy receives a great deal of support through research based curriculum and early invention programs currently in place
3. Grades 4 – 5, when students move into the process of “reading to learn” and direct reading instruction is no longer the focus. Students in these grades, however, must continue to receive reading instruction and support, especially in deficient areas.
4. Grades 6 - 8, when literacy skills need to be presented through content areas, with teachers focusing on specific skills needed to be successful in these specific subjects.
5. Grades 9 - 12, when students need to develop advanced literacy skills in a range of content areas, in preparation for college and career.
6. Adult literacy and post-secondary education, when literacy skills of adults need to be supported in order for adults to be successful in college and the workforce.

The purpose of this plan is to articulate OSSE's leadership role in the complex system of stakeholders at all levels of DC's literacy initiatives. The plan identifies five state-level strategies and specific action steps that OSSE has taken and will continue to take to support literacy initiatives at the district and school levels as reflected in our successful application for Flexibility from the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (Education Plan) and our commitment to implement Common Core State Standards.

While there are many ways to improve literacy instruction, most of the hard work of improving the quality of literacy instruction, exposing children to rich literature, and providing interventions to struggling readers must take place in schools, homes, and community organizations. Therefore, the state literacy plan focuses on strategies that acknowledge the unique role of the state and capitalize on state levers. All of these strategies are intended to support the goal of all students achieving at least 75% proficiency within five years in reading.

The strategies are as follows:

- Strategy One: Engage Parents and Community Members in Increasing Students' Literacy Skills
- Strategy Two: Raise Literacy Expectations Across the Curriculum
- Strategy Three: Build Educators' Capacity to Provide Literacy Instruction
- Strategy Four: Measure Students' Progress in Literacy at the School, District and State Levels
- Strategy Five: Support LEAs in Providing Interventions to Low-Performing Schools

OSSE was successful in receiving a grant from the Striving Readers Program in September of 2010. This grant allowed OSSE to create a state literacy team comprised of 15 members that began meeting in November of 2010 and concluded in July of 2012. The role of this team was to provide OSSE with input from a diverse range of perspectives to inform the State Literacy Plan. The State Literacy Plan was then revised in November and December of 2012 to align with DC's successful application for flexibility from the Elementary and Secondary Education Act.

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Following are descriptions of each of OSSE's strategies and the associated activities that OSSE will undertake.

STATE STRATEGIES AND ACTION STEPS

STRATEGY ONE:

Engage Parents and Community Members in Increasing Students' Literacy Skills

The first strategy is to engage parents and community members in increasing students' literacy skills through outreach, education, and access to resources.

Justification: Parents are children's first teachers and have a great impact on their early literacy skills. Unfortunately, achievement gaps already exist when children start kindergarten. Moreover, early literacy skills at kindergarten entry predict children's later academic success. Therefore, parents and community organizations can play a significant role in exposing children to rich literacy experiences before they enter school.

Action Steps:

OSSE will engage in a variety of activities to raise awareness and educate parents and community members about how they can improve children's literacy skills.

Parent Summit: OSSE will hold an annual "Parent Summit" in order to reach out to all parents and families in the District of Columbia to provide literature, books and seminars on all aspects of what "College and Career Ready" means to them and their children.

Parent Resources: OSSE will disseminate resources on CCSS and literacy development to parents and community members through a CCSS web site and other forums. These resources will include documents outlining the standards, explaining their importance, and teaching parents how they can help their children succeed.

Literacy Awareness Activities: Finally, OSSE will participate in and leverage existing literacy awareness activities run by other organizations within the District such as the Read for the Record event run by Jumpstart.

STRATEGY TWO:

Raise Literacy Expectations across the Curriculum

The second strategy is to raise the literacy expectations across curricula, building on the District's adoption of the Common Core State Standards (CCSS) in English Language Arts.

Justification: Students can't demonstrate the literacy skills that they need to be successful in school and their careers if they aren't taught to sufficiently rigorous standards. The Common Core State Standards provide a consistent and clear set of expectations for what students should know and be able to do to succeed in college and career.

Action Steps: OSSE will support LEAs in implementing the CCSS through Strategies Three and Four.

STRATEGY THREE:

Build Educators' Capacity to Provide Literacy Instruction

The third strategy is to build educator capacity to provide literacy instruction by arming them with tools, information, and skills to help students meet the CCSS.

Justification: The instructional shifts embodied by the CCSS are new to teachers as well as challenging for students. Teachers need support in learning how to modify their instruction to teach to the CCSS and in learning what teaching to the CCSS actually “looks like” in the classroom.

Action Steps: We know that multiple targeted strategies are needed to build the capacity of DC educators in the field of literacy. OSSE primary role is to share high quality resources, provide professional development, convene LEAs so they can share information and best practices, and revise licensure requirements to ensure teachers are prepared to teach to the CCSS. OSSE has identified supporting educators of EL students, special education students, struggling learners, and economically disadvantaged students as a priority. In addition, we don't want to ignore the needs of teachers of advanced learners.

High Quality Resources: OSSE will provide LEAs with access to high quality resources on CCSS, primarily through OSSE's Common Core web site, LearnDC.com. LearnDC.com provides both local and national information about the Common Core State Standards. The web site includes specific pages dedicated to background information about CCSS, specific information about English/language arts, mathematics and other subjects, and targeted information and related resources for early childhood education, English learners, K-12 and students with specialized education needs. The web site also contains a comprehensive, searchable and growing resource library of websites, documents, videos and presentations. As the website's resource library is further developed, additional resources will be added based on DC's student achievement data and stakeholder needs and requests.

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Professional Development: OSSE will provide professional development on the content of the state assessments, which are the interpretation of the CCSS, including on composition instruction and constructed response anchor papers. OSSE will also continue to provide professional development opportunities that address the unique needs of teachers of ELL and special education students such as Text Complexity and Academic Discourse, Teaching with Language in Mind, and Academic Language. Additionally, OSSE will roll out a series of ELL-based professional development sessions will tackle academic support for ELL literacy in the teaching and learning continuum: planning, teaching, and assessment.

Promising Practices: LEAs will share information on effective teaching and learning along with high quality instructional materials as part of two Professional Learning Communities of Effectiveness (PLaCEs) grants through RTTT. These grants provide funds to LEAs on a competitive basis to develop professional learning communities. One of the grants, the Transforming Instruction through Lesson Study (TITLES) project, is led by E.L. Haynes Public Charter School working with a consortium of other Local Education Agencies. This project provides teachers with the opportunity to work with their peers across the District to develop expertise in delivering exceptional lessons based on the CCSS. This professional learning community has created an online library of 50 CCSS video lessons per grade in both mathematics and English/Language Arts for grades 3 through 9 to support every teacher in the adoption of the CCSS, regardless of participation in RTTT. Another 40 videos will be completed by the end of the school year. Additionally, the DC OSSE will curate promising lessons already developed and used by other states and make them available through the CCSS web site.

The second grant, the Teachers and Principals of Pupils of Promise (TOPP), is led by Cesar Chavez Public Charter Schools for Public Policy. The consortium focuses on four topics, one of which is the CCSS and will also develop a resource portal containing well-defined, vertically articulated curriculum exemplars and quarterly teacher training based upon the CCSS. The consortium will work together to develop high quality unit and lesson plans aligned to the CCSS, engaging activities for students at all ability levels, exemplar videos of identified teaching practices (aligned to high yield strategies), and case studies of improving teacher practice.

Teacher Licensure Requirements: Finally, OSSE will revise teacher licensure requirements to align with the CCSS by the end of 2014. These new licensure requirements will ensure that teachers are prepared to teach to the CCSS before they enter the classroom.

STRATEGY FOUR:

Measure Students' Progress in Literacy at the School, District and State Levels

The fourth strategy is to measure students' progress in literacy at the state, district, and school levels through the DC CAS and other assessments that are aligned with the CCSS.

Justification: States, districts, and schools can't know if students are making progress in developing their literacy skills if we don't measure their achievement using rigorous assessments that are aligned to the CCSS. The state assessment is OSSE's most powerful tool for measuring student performance, reporting on student progress, and ensuring that students are being taught to the CCSS. The aligned assessment is OSSE's interpretation of the key components of the CCSS in English/Language Arts. Moreover, frequent assessment is also important to inform changes to instructional practice.

OSSE is in the process of developing a kindergarten readiness assessment that will be used to provide LEAs with information on children's knowledge and skills upon entry to school.

Action Steps: OSSE will continue to implement assessments aligned to the CCSS, report on students' progress, and provide professional development and resources related to the assessments.

CCSS-Aligned DC CAS and PARCC: The DC CAS assessment was aligned to CCSS in English/Language Arts in the 2011-12 school year and is therefore a powerful measure of rigorous literacy skills. OSSE is a member of the PARCC consortium and is therefore involved in decisions about the design of developing this new assessment. DC students will begin taking the PARCC assessment in the 2014 – 2015 school year.

Professional Development and Resources on DC CAS and PARCC: As mentioned earlier, OSSE will continue to provide training to LEAs on the modified DC CAS assessments and the PARCC. OSSE will also provide released test items to LEAs for the DC CAS and PARCC. The training and resources will help LEAs measure students' progress on items that are similar to those that will be on the state assessments and will also inform their instruction.

Interim Assessments Aligned to the CCSS: LEAs that participate in Race to the Top are committed to administering interim assessments aligned to the CCSS. These assessments provide LEAs with frequent data on students' progress towards mastering the standards. OSSE will encourage other LEAs to administer interim assessments aligned to the CCSS before the PARCC assessment is complete.

Report on Students' Progress in Literacy: OSSE will report on students' progress in literacy by reporting student proficiency on the DC CAS, transitioning to PARCC when it becomes available. OSSE will also publish school report cards annually that report on students' literacy scores.

Supplemental data will be provided by the National Assessment of Educational Progress, the SAT, and the ACT INC. The SAT and ACT data will be used to determine college readiness in the upper grade levels, while the early grades generally rely on assessment tools such as DIBELS and curriculum-embedded assessment designed to focus on improving instructional quality. LEAs and individual schools should also design and implement a data-driven system that includes a range of benchmark, curriculum-based assessments that allow teachers to acquire and track accurate data on individual student needs and progress. Finally, OSSE is in the process of developing a kindergarten readiness assessment that will be used to provide LEAs with information on children's knowledge and skills upon entry to school. This assessment will not be used for high stakes purposes, but will be used to inform instruction and early intervention.

Administer Kindergarten Entrance Assessment (KEA): OSSE will administer the KEA statewide in the fall of 2013. The purpose of the KEA is to establish a baseline measure of the domains of school readiness for all DC students. These domains include language and literacy, social and emotional development, mathematical thinking, scientific inquiry, social studies, approaches to learning, and health.

STRATEGY FIVE:

Support LEAs in Providing Interventions to Low-Performing Schools

The final strategy is to support LEAs in providing interventions to low-performing schools and students by implementing an accountability system that requires interventions and supports and providing guidance and technical assistance to LEAs.

Justification: Low performing schools need intensive interventions and supports to improve their performance and to provide effective literacy instruction. OSSE will provide guidance and resources to LEAs so they can better serve these schools.

Action Steps: OSSE will assess all DC schools using the ESEA Waiver accountability system, will categorize schools based on their performance, and will devote additional guidance and resources to the lowest performing schools, labeled priority schools.

Accountability System: OSSE's newly approved application for ESEA Flexibility outlines a new accountability system that uses multiple measures to assess school performance and identifies the lowest performing schools for more intensive intervention and support. A component of OSSE's new accountability system consists of indexing and classifying schools based on multiple measures including student proficiency, growth, graduation rates, attendance, and participation rates. Schools are then classified into five categories: **Reward, Rising, Developing, Focus and Priority** and are assigned annual measurable objectives (AMOs) in English/Language Arts and Math through 2017. AMOs were initially set at the school level based on school year 2010-11 performance; trajectories will be set to decrease by half the percentage of non-proficient students by 2017 through interim school-based targets.

Additionally, OSSE proposes two AMOs for the District as a whole: proficiency in ELA and proficiency in mathematics. Proficiency AMOs will be reported annually at the state, LEA, and school levels for all students and all subgroups, and will be used to guide interventions in LEAs and schools identified as needing additional support.

Interventions and Supports: All LEAs with Focus or Priority schools must develop plans to implement specific interventions and supports and then implement those plans. LEAs with

Priority schools must implement strategies that address the seven principles for school turnaround. These strategies are as follows: school leadership; effective staffing practices and instruction; effective use of time; curriculum, assessment and intervention system; effective use of data; school climate and culture, and effective family and community engagement. All of these strategies touch on effective literacy instruction in some way.

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Focus schools are those that have a low performing subgroup. LEAs with Focus schools must implement interventions that address the needs of that subgroup. For example, if an LEA has a low performing group of students with disabilities, that LEA could build the capacity for special education teachers to better understand the rigor of the CCSS.

Schools are also encouraged to include strategies that increase their own capacity to improve literacy instruction in school improvement and Title I plans. Their strategies should focus on English Learners (EL), Special Education, and struggling readers and should have intervention plans with specific strategies for targeting the lowest performing students, as outlined in the ESEA Waiver specifications.

Guidance and Technical Assistance: OSSE manages a Cross-Functional Team (CFT) that is staffed by various DC OSSE personnel from multiple divisions and external partners where appropriate to ensure effective implementation of meaningful interventions for both Priority and Focus schools. The OSSE provides training to enable the CFT to recognize an LEA's successes—both in terms of results in student learning and universal application of effective practice—and its deficiencies, enhancing the motivation for change.

Resources developed by the DC OSSE and used in priority school interventions will include CCSS curriculum and assessments, professional development supporting improved instruction, data systems for improving teaching and learning, guidelines for identifying quality enhanced and extended learning opportunities, and innovative strategies to support special education students, ELLs, and under-performing students.

The CFT also provides feedback on the schools' implementation of their intervention plans. OSSE will work with DCPS and PCSB turnaround experts to determine training needs, and provide tailored services to suit individual school's needs.

Quality Rating and Improvement System (QRIS): OSSE will implement a statewide QRIS in the fall of 2013 in all early learning programs to determine the quality of the programs and the types of interventions and supports the programs need to ensure students are ready for kindergarten. The six standards assessed by the QRIS are program management, learning environment, classroom supervision, family engagement, staff qualifications, and licensing/compliance.

CONCLUSION

Literacy skills are the foundation for success in college and career. OSSE's literacy plan is intended to support Districts, schools, parents and community members in improving literacy instruction for children. OSSE acknowledges that improving literacy achievement will require collaboration across the system.

DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA LITERACY STRATEGIES AND ACTIVITIES

Engage parents and community members in increasing students' literacy skills	Raise literacy expectations across the curriculum	Build educators' capacity to provide literacy instruction	Measure students' progress in literacy at the school, district and state levels	Support LEAs in Providing Interventions to Low-Performing Schools
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Offer yearly "Parent Summit" events with break-out sessions to address literacy needs • Disseminate information to help parents and community understand the Common Core (CC) Standards • Participate in and leverage existing literacy activities within the District 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • OSSE will support LEAs in implementing the CCSS through Strategies Three and Four. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provide high quality resources on the CCSS, primarily through DC's CCSS web site • Provide professional development on state assessments and for teachers of ELL and special education students • Provide access to promising practices through professional learning communities • Revise licensure requirements to ensure teachers are prepared to teach to the CCSS 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Implement CCSS-Aligned DC CAS and PARCC when it is available • Provide professional development and resources on DC CAS and PARCC • Encourage LEAs to implement interim assessments aligned to the CCSS • Report on students' progress in literacy • Administer Kindergarten Entrance Assessment 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Identify low-performing schools, through the DC Accountability system • Require LEAs to implement interventions and supports in Priority and Focus schools • Provide guidance to LEAs and use the Cross Functional Team to leverage internal expertise in addressing chronic issues • Implement Quality Rating and Improvement System to assess early learning programs

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ⁱ White, S., and McCloskey, M. (forthcoming). *Framework for the 2003 National Assessment of Adult Literacy* (NCES 2005-531). U.S. Department of Education. Washington, DC: National Center for Education Statistics